GUIDE TO THE SP7 BACAIRI FILE

/During the last quarter of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century there seem to have been two main geographical clusters of Bacairi, which were referred to as the western Bacairi and the eastern Bacairi, both located within the Mato Grosso region of Brazil. When seen by von den Steinen in 1884, the western Bacairi were concentrated in two settlements, one near the Rio Novo and one along the Rio Paranatinga. Even at that early date the western Bacairi were considered to be rather highly acculturated. By contrast, the eastern Bacairi, living in a number of villages along the Batoví and Kulisehu rivers in the Upper Xingú region, were almost completely unacculturated. But by 1924, according to Schmidt (pp. 31, 35), all the Bacairi of the Batoví and Kulisehu rivers who were not wiped-out by disease had moved to settlements along the Rio Paranatinga. The Bacairi speak a language of the Cariban stock, one of the most widespread stocks in South America.

The following cultural summary refers primarily to the traditional culture of the eastern Bacairi in the Upper Xingú region (cf. G.P. Murdock, Outline of South American Cultures, p. 87). Subsistence is based on slash-and-burn agriculture supplemented by fishing and to a lesser extent hunting. Bitter and sweet manioc, maize and sweet potatoes are the staple crops, while secondary crops include beans, peanuts, tobacco and cotton. They also gather wild fruits and nuts, and often transplant and even irrigate the trees that bear them. Men clear the land, hunt, and make baskets and bark canoes. Women plant and cultivate the crops; both sexes make pottery. Extensive trade is carried on with the Aueto, Trumai, Waura and Yaruma.

Dwellings are elliptical in shape with thatched roofs extending to the ground, and are substantially built. A village may consist of from three to six or twelve houses arranged in a circle around a village plaza on which stands a ceremonial hall and a guest house.

Each village is headed by a chief, and the villages are politically independent. According to Oberg (p. 73), there appears to be no evidence that the Bacairi had clans or moieties. Marriages are arranged by parents and involve no bride price. They are generally monogamous, but polygyny is permissible. Local endogamy seem to prevail. The Bacairi have Iroquois cousin terminology and bifurcate merging kin terms in the first ascending generation.

This file contains six sources; there are 2 translations from the German, 2 from the Portuguese, and 1 from the Spanish. The earliest source is 1: Steinen, which is a report in the form of a travel account of the first von den Steinen Xingú expedition in 1884. The villages of at least 4 different tribes were visited during a period of 5 months. Of this time, somewhat over 2 months were spent among the Bacairi of the Rio Batovi. Four Bacairi villages, with a total population of about 240, were visited. Also, the 2 villages of the western Bacairi were contacted, and their population is given as ca. 55 for the Rio Novo settlement, and ca. 20 for the Rio Paranatinga village.

2: Steinen remains the basic ethnographic source on the Bacairi. Out of a period of two months field-work in the Upper Xingú region, about 1 month was spent in 1887 with the Bacairi of the Rio Kulisehu. The report of this 2nd Xingú expedition covers both physical anthropology and the full range of ethnographic topics, plus some culture history. Most of the data are presented in the form of a comparative description with other Kulisehu river tribes — the villages of 7 different tribes were visited, and interviews were

conducted with informants from 2 other tribes. Three Bacairi villages, with a total population of ca. 160, were studied, and information was obtained concerning a fourth village. The most serious weakness in the von den Steinen data is the very inadequate treatment of social organization.

In 2: Steinen there are also separate sections devoted to the Paressi (SP19) and the Bororo (SP8), which have been marked for those files. The Paressi material is rather short and derived from interviews with a dozen informants, but the Bororo data are extensive and quite useful, being based mainly on one month's fieldwork in a recently established Bororo settlement in 1888.

3: Abreu focuses mainly on the Bacairi language. The data were obtained from one informant (not in the field) probably around 1892.

4: Schmidt presents a history of the Bacairi from the time of von den Steinen to 1927 when his own fieldwork was done. By this time the Xingú Bacairi had settled along the Rio Paranatinga both in and near the Simões Lopes Government Post. He describes numerous sociopolitical and cultural changes.

5: Altenfelder Silva and 6: Oberg both conducted their fieldwork in 1947 mainly at the Simões Lopes Post. Oberg estimates the total Bacairi population at that time in the northern part of Mato Grosso State to be 200 to 250 (p. 69). Oberg attempts a general reconstruction of Bacairi culture as it existed about 1907 along the Rio Kulisehu, his data deriving mainly from informants. Altenfelder Silva presents a brief description of Bacairi technology, kinship terminology, and ritual life, focusing on the series of ritualistic seclusions, or uanki, that occur at intervals during the life cycle.

With the von den Steinen data, the Bacairi are one of the best described Brazilian tribes prior to almost any acculturation to western civilization./

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